

Preparing Patient Education Materials

People at all literacy levels prefer written materials that are simple and attractive.

Most people, even those who read well, use visual clues to reinforce learning.

- Graphics and videos can help patients absorb new information, especially when used with written materials.¹⁻⁶
- Brochures alone cannot change health behavior, but written materials can provide accurate information in a way that is easy to read and easy to understand.
- Elderly patients given a simplified leaflet that included graphics were five times more likely to get their pneumococcal vaccine than were those in a control group who received a text-only brochure. They were also four times more likely to talk to their doctors about getting the vaccination.⁷

The most helpful written materials for all users, especially poor readers:^{4-6, 8}

- Emphasize the desired behavior rather than the medical facts. Education is more important than information.
- Have just one or two educational objectives — what the reader needs to learn and do. In this case, less really is more.
- Use clear headings, bullets instead of paragraphs, and ample white space (a Q&A format works especially well).
- Use short sentences, active voice, and conversational language — “give” instead of “administer” and “birth control” instead of “contraception.”
- Use pictures and examples to illustrate important points.
- Supplement written material with conversation, video, and audio sources.

continued on back

Revision of the Package Insert for “The Pill,” Based on Patient Interviews⁹

SIDE EFFECTS OF ORAL CONTRACEPTIVES

Vaginal bleeding

Irregular vaginal bleeding or spotting may occur when you are taking the pills. Irregular bleeding may vary from slight staining between menstrual periods to breakthrough bleeding which is a flow much like a regular period. Irregular bleeding occurs most often during the first few months of oral contraceptive use, but may also occur after you have been taking the pill for some time. Such bleeding may be temporary and usually does not indicate any serious problems.

Original (6 pt. type)

Bleeding side effects

You may have some spotting or light bleeding between periods, especially after you miss any pills.

Revision (10 pt. type)

Involve patients in developing the materials.^{3, 5,10-12}

- Bring together members of the intended audience to discuss how to make the message attractive, relevant, and understandable.
- Field test, revise, then re-test content, language, illustrations, and layout until you are sure the material accomplishes its purpose.

The Internet is not yet a viable option.

Searching the Internet requires high-level literacy skills.

- This puts poor readers at another disadvantage, one that becomes more critical as reliance on using the Internet as a primary resource increases.^{3, 13}
- However, the Internet can be an excellent resource for those who are providing and/or developing information for patients.

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